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# The Evolution of Home Economics at Iowa State

## V. The "Dinky"

By RUTH ELAINE WILSON

TIME was (in the '80's) when the mere idea of a car line between Ames and the college would have provoked a grin, wide and skeptical. In fact, it would have been considered a joke. I have now to tell you how two brave pioneers in the cause of progress set forth to break down these walls of opposition and planted the idea, which eventually brought forth fruit in the shape of the "dinky."

These two pioneers entered the college in 1887, enrolled in the department of mechanical engineering. There were fifteen members in their class, not a small group, considering that the entire student body totaled 300. And not to keep you longer in suspense the pioneers were Charles D. Davidson and John A. Bramhall.

During the time that these two lived the life of the under-graduate, they grappled with science, solved the problems of the world and eventually arrived at their senior year with but one thing between them and a sheep-skin, a thesis. It was necessary to produce such a document in order to be properly "finished."

"Great oaks from little acorns grow," and the steam engine was the result of a tea-kettle. Whether the following episode was at the bottom of the idea which germinated a thesis, which produced the "dinky" which developed the "Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern," I am not permitted to say. However—

One of these pioneers arriving on the campus in his freshman year found himself put up at one of the "cottages." His room was a barn-like place containing nothing but the bare necessities and on the second day the pioneer set forth to procure for himself the essentials he found lacking.

Now in these early days there were two alternatives to choose between when one considered a trip to town. These were the bus or the constitutional. If you chose the former it involved two horses, a bus, much favoring a grocery wagon (capacity ten individuals, five along each side), and 10 cents. If you decided on the constitutional, it comprised shoe-leather, a ravenous appetite and a good disposition.

Well, not to keep you holding your breath longer—this pioneer lacked the 10 cents. Rather, he had it, but he was jealous of it. When one carries out ashes, or repairs locks and keys, or puts in window lights, at the rate of 10 cents an hour, one becomes prudent in the matter of bus rides.

The Pioneer "constitutionaled" to Ames and purchased the following essentials, to wit: 1 broom, 1 dust-pan, 1 wash bowl, 1 pitcher, 1 lamp, 1 donacher.

Have you ever walked two miles with a load such as that? Well, then, imagine it. I am not in the mood to do justice to the pathetic struggles of our Hero. To



The "Dinky". The depot was what is now the college bookstore and post office. It was then in its prime, a really pretty building with a long covered train shed on its right side.

ease your mind, he survived. And as I write I am more and more convinced that the episode does have great bearing on the thesis produced.

But when the thesis problem presented its ugly face the pioneers consolidated their efforts, racked their mechanical wits and out of past experiences and native intelligence conceived the idea of "An Electric Railroad Between Ames and the College".

Pioneer No. 1 (and our Hero) did the mechanical and electrical features, including the designs for the power plant.

Pioneer No. 2 wrote up the special features in regard to cost of operation and probable income from the railroad. The whole thing involved several hours a day for a year of college work. But finally it was finished, all but typewriting.

The thesis was accordingly pecked into shape at the office of J. L. Stevens, an attorney at Ames. Attorney Stevens was interested in the idea and offered to do the typing free of charge and pay the Pioneers the price of \$1.25 for a carbon copy of the thesis. The Pioneers were stunned. One dollar and twenty-five cents looked like the beginnings of a fortune. They accepted the offer.

Later the two were called before a faculty committee which included Professor Stanton, Professor Budd and Attorney Stevens to read and explain their masterpiece.

Here follow a few excerpts from the original copy:

"Altho but one passenger car will be operated at a time, another to use in case of breakdown and at busy seasons of the year will be in readiness. Of these cars one will be open to be used more particularly in pleasant weather, the other to be a closed car 16 feet long, seating capacity of 22, but which may be loaded to 75. \* \* \* The railroad is to be operated eight months of the year and a man to attend to the finances and operating of the road will be paid \$60 per month. \* \* \* The cars will run from 7 a. m. to 7 p. m. (10 p. m. on especial occasions).

By running Sundays students will be able to identify themselves with churches of Ames and Ames citizens will be permitted to attend our services.

"Arguments in favor of the railroad:

"(1) Students average one trip a week to Ames; that is 300 in six days or 50 a day. Will not the time saved in making the trip increase the number who make the trip from 50 to 60 daily?

"(2) Under the bus system five members of the faculty live in Ames. Two more would move had they means of getting back and forth.

"(3) The ladies will have calls to make on faculty and citizens of Ames, say one a week. These calls must be returned. This will make 34 trips."

The Pioneers were dismissed after their presentation and shortly informed that their work was creditable and the thesis problem solved. Two weeks later they were awarded the coveted sheepskins.

It was not until some time later that the Pioneers learned that their seed had been cast on fertile soil. Professors Stanton, Budd and Attorney Stevens had organized a company to put in a railroad between Ames and the college. J. L. Stevens was president of the corporation. Ties and rails were purchased and the work begun. It is said that the ties were not all that might have been wished. They were good cedar, but holes were rotted in at the ends. The company discussed them from all angles. And Professor Budd declared that the holes would last longer than the ties. They were finally accepted, however, and the work went on. On July 9, 1891, the "dinky" itself pulled on, a bottailed train of two cars, square and boxlike, which carried 200 passengers to the load. The engine was an old second-hand steam locomotive once used on the old belt line railroad in Des Moines, running from the downtown district to Hyland Park. This was the "dinky"—the result of the Pioneer thesis, a steam engine and not the electric car on which they had figured.

But it was a success. Besides hauling all the freight between the college and Ames—a trunk would go for 10 cents, it made four trips daily with the fourth ward children, taking them to Ames to school and back. Old "Hank" Wilkinson, the engineer and the best natured old soul in the world, enjoyed this part of his work especially, and loaded and unloaded the little Knapps, and MacKays and Beardshears and the rest of the small fry, who are large fry now, every school-day during the lifetime of the "dinky", without a casualty. And financially the "dinky" far exceeded the expectations of the Pioneers. The year before it was absorbed into the electric railroad from Des Moines it cleared \$10,000.